

Breaking Glass

by thepuppiesinpink

Category: Madam Secretary

Genre: Angst, Drama

Language: English

Characters: Elizabeth M., Henry M.

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-04-11 07:28:43

Updated: 2016-04-15 03:13:15

Packaged: 2016-04-27 20:00:09

Rating: T

Chapters: 8

Words: 15,207

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Here's a response to the 2.20 preview. It's awful, it's unrealistic, and it's too angsty. I'm sorry, y'all. Rating is for language and violence. C/W for domestic violence.

1. Chapter 1

A/N: Updated. This story concerns domestic violence. It is not everyone's cup of tea. It is almost unreasonably angsty.

I have included some notes on my intentions for this story in chapter 8. Feel free to skip there and then come back. It will give away some plot, but you might find that helpful.

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><p>Henry couldn't quite breathe properly. What was happening to him? He was so angry. Elizabeth wanted him to talk to her? As if! There was no way he could possibly talk to her. She just did not understand. If he spoke to her, she would feel terrible. She would probably panic, and he just couldn't have that on his conscience. The last couple weeks, he could tell his distance was getting to her. Her eyes would dart around, and she would speak so fast he could hardly understand her.

No. He couldn't speak to Elizabeth. But she thought she could fix everything with a simple conversation and some soothing, comforting sex. Well, she couldn't. Not this time.

A hug wasn't going to fix nearly getting blown up. A kiss wasn't going to fix his dad dying.

God. Why couldn't she understand? She could always read him so well. And yet, when it actually mattered, she was just brushing the whole problem under the rug. How could she just go on with her day? How could she expect Henry to keep going?

Now that he thought about it, he hadn't given her much of a choice. She had been trying to help him, and he had accused her of interfering in his career. Maybe he was partially to blame, but that made him all the angrier.

He could feel it rising in his chest. The anger. It was always there now, hiding behind his calm exterior. He was a good man, but anger was still his first instinct. When he didn't understand what was going on, he would get angry.

He didn't understand anything. He didn't understand his feelings. He didn't understand Elizabeth. And he certainly didn't understand how he was going to fix terrorism. That was his _job_. He was supposed to fix things. Well, it wasn't going to work this time.

"Don't you understand? I CAN'T talk to you!" His anger had reached a boiling point. He turned to face Elizabeth, suddenly livid. How the hell did she expect him to calmly discuss this? Well, fine. She wanted him to address it, he would.

Elizabeth sucked in her breath. Henry had never yelled at her like that. Sure, their arguments would get heated sometimes. They'd exchange choice words, and they'd raise their voices, but not with that tone. It scared her.

Henry put himself directly in front of Elizabeth. "What do you want from me, huh? Because I've had just about enough of this."

"Henry, baby, I just want you to talk to me. We can work this outâ€¦"

"No! We can't! And we aren't going to get anywhere at all until you understand that this just isn't going to work out!" He was stomping around the room now, half speaking, and half shouting.

Fear clenched Elizabeth. What did he mean it wouldn't work out? Their marriage? Their jobs? Catching Disah? "Henryâ€¦ calm downâ€¦ It's going to be okayâ€¦" She was trying to keep her breaths even, but it was obvious that she was getting scared. Tears began to gather at the corners of her eyes.

"I will not calm down! You just don't fucking get it! If you want me to clean up after you all the time, I have news for you. I'm done with your shit. You can't keep doing this to me!" He came back to her and grasped her shoulders roughly, shocking her. She would have bruises from his tight grip. He could see the tears start to trickle down her cheeks. "You can't just treat me like an afterthought every time I become inconvenient to you." His voice was menacingly calm now. He didn't care that he was hurting her - he barely even noticed. "You betrayed me when you turned in Dmitri, and now you won't even help me get his sister out alive. I don't know who you've become, Elizabeth. So don't stand there on your fucking soapbox and tell me I'm the one who has fucked up here. This is on you. I'm done."

He only meant to release her with a little shake, but in his enraged state, he didn't realize his strength with all the endorphins and adrenaline coursing through his bloodstream. Instead of a small jolt, he very nearly pushed Elizabeth into the wall behind her.

Her tears fell in full force now as she tried to find her equilibrium, catching herself against the wall. She knew she wasn't seriously injured, but her husband had tried to hurt her. Henry. After everything. After Iran and all his tender attentionsâ€¦ He had pushed her with force. She wanted to fight back. She wanted to scream back at him. He needed to know that she wouldn't put up with that. She had spent years telling her daughters not to put up with that kind of behavior from men. They needed to have more respect for themselves than to allow themselves to stay in a situation like that.

But this was Henry. She could see the pain he was trying to conceal with anger. He needed her.

She tried to get her bearings and go to him, but he snarled at her.

"Don't even think about it." Henry's mind was racing. A small, rational part of himself was appalled that he had pushed his wife, but rage still filled him. _She deserved it. Maybe that would wake her up._

"Babe, please." Elizabeth held her hands out to him, trying to soothe him.

But he refused to be soothed.

"I swear to God, Elizabeth, if you try to make me give up Talia, you've got another thing coming. You are so shortsighted and selfish you can't even see yourself. Do you understand what you are doing? No. You don't. Because you haven't even bothered to learn her name. But that doesn't matter to you as long as you get what you want. No one matters to you as long as you get what you want. I'm through being your tool. You can't keep passing me over because you think you know what's best. You aren't a genius, and you don't know everything!"

Bess stopped. He was insulting her with the hope that she would engage with him in the little battle. She wouldn't. She knew better. He would have to let his steam out some other way.

"Henry, let's talk about this later when we've both had a chance to coolâ€¦"

"Fuck you! I'm sick of the rules of when I can speak to you and when I can't! I'm done walking on eggshells trying to keep you happy. This just isn't working. None of it is working. You only think everything is fine because everyone goes out of their way to make sure you _are_ fine. But you couldn't do any of this without all your advisors and your assistants and me. No. You can just fucking learn how the rest of us do it. You know who is going to comfort Talia? No one. So you can just figure it out. I'm done."

With that, he turned to leave the room. He paused next to a table by the door as Elizabeth called out to him.

"I'll do better, Henry. Please. We can both try harderâ€¦"

"I'm done listening to you. Figure it out on your own."

Henry saw the water glasses and pitcher on the table. A part of him needed Elizabeth to acknowledge that she wasn't as put together as she claimed to be. Later, he would regret this moment, but not just then. He picked up a glass, looked back at her, meeting her eyes, and dropped the glass. It shattered loudly.

Elizabeth recoiled from the sound, but before she could get her bearings, Henry slammed the door behind himself on the way out.

She was alone.

And thanks to her husband, she couldn't breathe through her panic.

2. Chapter 2

A/N: Okay, y'all. Ask and you shall receive. It gets worse before it gets better. I have another chapter ready to go up, but I really want to know what you think of this one. I'm also not sure where to go with chapter 4, so I'm holding chapter 3 in case I need to revise it.

Thanks to Broadwayfreak for the beta work!

Also, I'm really thrilled with the reviews I've gotten on this one. I was totally expecting to be run out of town with pitchforks. But you've still got a chance to find your pitchforks...

Just to say, I do actually feel genuinely sorry for causing anyone emotional distress. ...not sorry enough to stop writing trashy stories, though. I have to express my trash self...

* * *

><p>Elizabeth was alone. She needed to find the phone. She needed to call Henâ€| someone. Dr. Sherman? Yeah. Dr. Sherman.<p>

She tried to stand, but her legs were shaky. Her vision was playing tricks on her. She couldn't think straight. Nothing could penetrate the suffocating fog of her panic. The only coherent thought she could latch onto was that she needed to get to the phone.

As she reached for the phone, her high heel caught on the broken glass that lay shattered on the floor. It made her trip. She could tell she was falling, but she couldn't bring herself to care. What did it matter? Her world was already spinning.

As she hit the floor, her head caught the edge of the table. The sharp corner created a small gash on her forehead, and it slipped to hit her eye.

With that, her world went black. There was no way to know if she had finally succumbed to the panic, or if it was hitting her head that caused her blackout.

* * *

><p>Stevie walked into the entryway of her home. She called out to the empty house, "Anyone home? I'm hungry. Is there any lasagna

left?"<p>

Turning, she saw her mother lying on the floor, blood trickling from her temple.

_No. No. God, no. _"MOM!"

She rushed over, trying to find a pulse on her mother's neck. She breathed a sigh of relief at finding a nice, healthy, strong pulse beating beneath her fingers.

Stevie pulled out her phone and dialed the emergency number that was programmed on speed dial. She wasn't really sure who would even answer the line. It didn't matter now.

"Stevie, what's wrong?"

She could tell it was one of her mother's DS agents on the other end of the line.

"It's Mom. She's unconscious, and she's bleeding."

* * *

><p>Even an hour later, Stevie couldn't precisely remember what exactly had happened. She and her mother were whisked off to the hospital, and she was stuck in a waiting room. Eventually, her siblings joined her. None of them knew what was happening.<p>

"You said Mom was okay, right?"

"Yeah. She wasn't bleeding too much. I don't know what knocked her out, but she didn't seem hurt otherwise. Her eye was swollen some." The image of her mother unconscious on the floor was now burned into her mind. She couldn't remember the events of the past hour, but she would never forget the image of her mother unresponsive and bloodied on the floor.

A doctor approached the McCord children as they sat. Stevie stood up. "Is she awake?"

"Your mother is fine, kids. She's going to be just fine. Don't worry. She's awake and talking. You can go in and see her in a little bit."

Jason and Ali threw their arms around each other. It was uncharacteristic for them, but Ali had been on the verge of tears since she had been brought to the waiting room, and Jason could tell. He wasn't doing too much better, himself.

Stevie ran her hand up and down Ali's back, and looked back to the doctor. "What was wrong?"

"Your mom can explain everything in a few minutes. I want you to talk to my friend Mrs. Carlyle first, though. She's just got a few questions for you. Nothing to worry about. She's just here to make sure you all are okay." The doctor offered a smile that was a little too chipper.

All three siblings exchanged confused a look. _Who is this woman, and

why do we have to talk to her before we can see our mom?_

They sat waiting a few more minutes before a short, old woman came up to them. She had stereotypical reading glasses perched at the end of her nose. She was the perfect picture of a grandmother.

"I'm Mrs. Carlyle, but you can call me Brenda. I just have a couple questions for you. When we're done, you can go right in and see your mom. Let's sit down over here."

She led the three McCords to an empty seating area. No one was within earshot. Stevie felt apprehensive.

"Alright. I just have a couple questions. You don't have to answer if you don't want to, but you won't get in any trouble. You haven't done anything wrong. And if you'd rather tell me in private, that's okay, too. I won't tell your parents anything you tell me."

Stevie looked at Ali. Their faces both showed concerned expressions.

"Have your parents ever gotten angry with you?" Mrs. Carlyle's expression was blank.

Jason looked shocked. "Why are you asking us that?"

"I'm just asking. You won't be in any trouble." The older woman tried to offer him a comforting smile. "When was the last time either of your parents yelled at you?"

Ali answered this time. "They haven't yelled at us in anger that I can remember." Her eyes were wide. _What was going on?_

"Alright. Do your parents discipline you physically?"

Again, Ali answered. "Not since we were really little. And even then, it wasn't a regular thing."

Stevie looked at her younger sister. She was staring straight ahead. Jason was looking back at Stevie, obviously upset and confused.

Mrs. Carlyle went on. "And have you seen your parents arguing recently?"

"No. They don't argue in front of us." The words seemed to slip out of Ali without thought.

Jason was surprised Ali was the one talking. They were all uncomfortable in this conversation, but Stevie was usually the one to speak if someone asked a question of the three of them. She was the oldest. Sometimes he would speak. Ali rarely got as impassioned as he did, and she wasn't quite as outgoing as her older sister.

Mrs. Carlyle reached a hand out to touch Ali's knee. "You're doing great. I've just got a couple more questions, and then we'll be all done."

Evidently Mrs. Carlyle could see how uncomfortable Ali was just as well as her siblings.

"Have any of you ever noticed any bruises on your mom? Any cuts or scrapes?"

"No." Jason spoke up this time. He could tell where this was going.

"No." Stevie agreed.

"Has your father ever hit you or your mother?" No expression showed on Brenda's face. Nothing to let on that she might as well be asking if the Pope was Buddhist.

"No. He respects women. And he wouldn't hit us." Jason got up and stormed off. His dad had been the one to teach him to treat girls with dignity. This made him mad.

Ali started crying. Mrs. Carlyle quickly produced some tissues.

"It's okay, Ali. You aren't going to get in any trouble."

"Why are you asking all this? Did something happen? My dad wouldn't do anything like that, ever."

"I just need to ask. I'm here to make sure you're safe." Mrs. Carlyle genuinely wanted to help. She had been more than surprised when she was summoned to speak to the McCord kids, but she had been in her position long enough to know that kids from any family, no matter how political, could be at risk.

"I want to go see Mom." Ali got up to follow Jason.

Brenda turned to Stevie, who was sitting in silence. "Stevie? You alright?"

"A while back, my dad yelled at me. He thought I was interfering with Mom's job because of the guy I was dating. He yelled at me to get out of the way." She went quiet again for a moment. "But he wouldn't hit her. I don't think he would hit her."

Stevie had been the one to find their mother. Could her dad have really done all that? Was he capable of that? She didn't know.

"Okay, honey. You've done well. Go see your mom. She wants to see you." Mrs. Carlyle was writing on her clipboard as the McCord siblings walked down the hall to find their mother.

* * *

><p>When Elizabeth came to, she found herself in a hospital bed. She groaned to herself. God, not again. Elizabeth McCord did not like hospitals.

She tried to sit up, but her head hurt. She couldn't seem to open her right eye, either.

"Madam Secretary, how do you feel?" A man in a white coat was looking at machines on her right side. She couldn't see him properly with her eye.

"Like I just got beat up by the Russian mobâ€|" She tried to crack a joke. She could tell it hadn't landed at all. A nurse was standing next to the doctor, and the two men exchanged glances.

"Ma'am, do you remember what happened today? Can you tell me?" The doctor pulled a chair up to the side of her bed.

"My husband and I had an argument. He accidentally broke some glass, and I guess I had a panic attack. Breaking glass isâ€| it's a problem for me." Elizabeth didn't want the doctor to know Henry had broken the glass intentionally. No one needed to know that.

"Did he touch you at all?" The doctor had a notepad out along with a pen.

"No. He was just mad. It was just an argument." _Why was she covering for him? Why was this doctor even asking? This was private._

"Ma'am. You came in with head trauma, a black eye, and finger marks on your arms. Do you know how you sustained those injuries?" The doctor was direct, but not unkind.

This man thinks it was Henry. "My husband didn't hit me. I must have fallen down and hit my head because of the panic attack."

"And the finger marks?"

"He might have grabbed me a little too hard when we were talking."

"I thought you called it an argument." The doctor was writing on his notepad now. It made Elizabeth uncomfortable.

"It was an argument, but it was fine. He wasn't trying to hurt me. He was just upset."

"If you want us to keep him away from you, we can do that. You have the right to press charges. We can keep him away from you and your children. You don't need to be afraid of him."

Elizabeth tried to straighten up. She needed to face this man down. "My husband is not a threat to me. He is not a threat to my children. I have nothing to press charges about."

"With all due respect, ma'am, your injuriesâ€|"

"No. Where are my children? I'm not pressing charges. This conversation is over."

"Your children are speaking with a counselor right now. They'll be in when they're done."

"You have someone speaking with my children?" Elizabeth was furious.

"Ma'am, this is standard protocol when we have a possible domestic violence situation." The doctor could sense her thinly veiled panic and frustration.

"Fine, but I want to see them. Get them in here."

"Yes, ma'am." With that, the doctor turned and left the room.

Elizabeth closed her eyes. On balance, this was most decidedly not one of the good days. She struggled to get herself together for the kids. She knew they would need her to be strong.

Henry, what have you done?

3. Chapter 3

A/N: Here's chapter 3! Hope you enjoy it! I'm really overwhelmed with how much positive feedback I've gotten on this story. I sincerely thought everyone would hate it. I'm glad you're as angsty as I am.

If you like my fanfiction, I have homework for you. Some of you know that I am legally blind. I want to start a Twitter campaign to get CBS to include audio descriptions for Madam Secretary. Audio descriptions run on the SAP (Second Audio Program) simultaneously with the television broadcast. They describe things like locations, facial features, and actions. These descriptions are critical to the enjoyment of tv and movies for blind people. Having these descriptions would help me understand what's going on in the episodes (which leads to better fanfiction). So, if would you please tweet at Madam Secretary, Tea, Tim, and anyone else, "Madam Secretary should include audio description for the visually impaired. No one should be excluded."

If you have a Netflix account, scroll to the bottom of the page and click on "Audio Description." There is quite a number of programs on Netflix with audio description. You can experience it for yourself. Madam Secretary is not on that list, and I want that to change. I love this show, and I love this fandom, and we should make sure it's accessible to everyone.

Feel free to message me on Tumblr or on here with any questions.

Not that I would hold a chapter hostage to get you to do what I want... but if you help me with my Twitter campaign, I'll post the next chapter...

I'm going to post the next chapter anyway, but I'll post it sooner. It's all ready to go.

Again, thanks to Broadwayfreak for the beta work!

* * *

><p>Her kids walked into the hospital room, talking amongst themselves, and looked at her. She still hadn't looked at herself in a mirror. Her eye was swollen shut, and a deep shade of purple. Her hair was messy and unkempt. The cut on her forehead had been bandaged up, but it was unsightly against her lightly tanned skin. At least the hospital gown covered the marks on her arms.<p>

Jason gasped at his mother's appearance. Ali stopped in her tracks.

Only Stevie walked forward to kiss her mother.

"Hey, momma. You feeling okay?"

"I'm okay, baby. How are you three holding up?"

Jason walked up to her. "Mom, did Dad hit you? Because the lady asked us questionsâ€|"

"No. Your dad didn't hit me. I must have fallen down." She was mentally kicking herself that she still couldn't quite remember what had happened.

"Mom?" Ali was still standing in the doorway.

"It's okay, Ali. Come here, baby. It's okay." Elizabeth opened her arms for her daughter. Ali tentatively approached her. Elizabeth looked at her. "I'm okay, Noodle."

Alison leaned down to hug her mother. She couldn't help her tears escaping. The tears had wanted to escape for a couple hours now. Alison was not built for this kind of stressful environment. No one was. "I was so worried, Mom. This woman was asking a bunch of questions about you and Dad. He didn't do this to you, did he?"

"Of course not, Noodle. I just fell down and hit my head on the table. But I'm going to be fine."

"Where is Dad?" Jason wanted his father's reassurance. No matter how many times his mother said she was fine, he knew that his dad could fix it.

"I'm not sure. I haven't had a chance to call him. Have you all tried?" Now that she thought about it, Elizabeth was surprised he wasn't there with the children. Hadn't her agents come to get him, too?

"I'm on it." Stevie pulled out her phone and tapped her dad's contact.

Sitting on Elizabeth's bed, they could all hear Henry's voicemail message.

"Did he get called into work, maybe?" Stevie looked at her mother hopefully.

"I'm sure he'll call just as soon as he can. Have you all had dinner?" Elizabeth needed to change the subject.

"No. We came straight here from school." Jason was hungry, even if his sisters weren't.

Elizabeth smiled, "Well, why don't you all go find us some food, huh?"

While the kids were gone, she called Dr. Sherman.

"Elizabeth? Is everything alright?" Her voice was calm and steady.

"Umâ€¦ I don't think soâ€¦ Henry and I had an argument. He left." In contrast, Elizabeth's voice was short and breathy.

"Where are you now? Do you know where he went?"

"I had a panic attackâ€¦ I don't quite remember. I must have hit my head. Stevie found me. I'm in the hospital now. I don't know where Henry is. He isn't picking up his phoneâ€¦" Her words trailed off. Her energy was fading quickly.

Dr. Sherman could hear the despair in her voice. "It's okay. Which hospital are you in? I'll come over. Don't worry."

* * *

><p>After seeing Elizabeth and her injuries, Dr. Sherman recommended that she not speak to Henry before he had a chance to cool off.<p>

Kinsey Sherman believed Elizabeth when she said that Henry hadn't caused her black eye. Even so, she wanted to talk to Henry in person before letting the couple try to work through recent events.

Tracking down Henry turned out to be the difficult issue. He wasn't answering his phone at all. Dr. Sherman was confident he would eventually find that he was ready to talk, and she was prepared to wait him out. Elizabeth was being held for twenty-four hours' observation at the hospital, anyway. She hoped Henry would get in touch with her by the time Elizabeth was back home.

Kinsey knew this would be a difficult and delicate process. If she hadn't known Henry so well, she knew she likely would not have counseled Elizabeth to attempt to reestablish a connection so soon, if at all. This was Henry McCord, though. He had been nothing if not supportive of his wife throughout all her interactions with him. She was confident in his abilities to see past temporary anger, and find the spark that had kept their relationship strong for so many years now.

But her approach would have to depend on Henry. Once he understood what he had done, she knew he would want to make amends. Her only thought was that he must not even be able to see well enough through his own hurt to know that he was harming his wife.

* * *

><p>Henry sat alone in a motel room in rural Virginia. He had only gone about an hour outside the city, but it helped him clear his head. It reminded him of the small farm he and Elizabeth had shared when they were both working at UVA. He was a city kid at heart, but the open land called him in a way that city could not. There were distractions in the city that simply did not exist out on a lonely highway.<p>

He looked at his cell phone. It seemed he was very popular all of a sudden. He had missed calls from his kids. Those, at least, he wanted to return. He didn't know what to tell them, though. He could hardly call them without acknowledging their mother. There was no way he could pretend they hadn't fought. Without speaking to Elizabeth, they

couldn't get their stories straight.

In the end, he ignored the phone calls from his children, too.

He turned his phone off and went to sleep, decidedly ignoring all of the thoughts bouncing around in his head, namely the unease he felt at sleeping in a strange and empty bed.

* * *

><p>When Henry woke up the next morning, he turned his phone back on. He had more missed calls and texts. He didn't bother to read them. Instead, he decided to take a shower.<p>

After getting out, he checked his phone again. He had three missed calls from Dr. Sherman.

He looked at himself in the mirror. If Elizabeth was really having a hard time, he didn't want to abandon her. That had never been his intent. He just needed some space. He called Dr. Sherman back, thinking that talking to her would be easier than speaking to Elizabeth.

"Henry?"

"Dr. Sherman, I'm returning your callâ€¦| calls."

"Henry, are you all right? Where are you?" Her voice was even.

"I'm fine. I'm doing some work in Virginia for a couple days."

"Oh really? Have you spoken to Elizabeth?"

"She and I had a little argument. I'll make up with her eventually. Did she call you?" Henry's voice was flat. He probably should have been more concerned, but he couldn't bring himself to muster the energy just then.

"She did. She agreed that you and I should talk before you two try to speak again."

"Is she that mad?" Henry wasn't surprised. His wife was fiery, and he knew she'd be mad at him. Truth be told, he might have wanted her to be mad at him. At least then she could experience a little bit of what was going on inside him.

"You aren't driving, are you?" Dr. Sherman wanted to make sure he was settled before she gave him the news.

"No, I'm alone. What is it?"

"Elizabeth is in the hospital. She has a mild concussion and some minor injuries."

"Oh, my God. I'll be down there right away." He started to get up and gather his things.

"Wait a minute, there. Henry, her injuriesâ€¦| She has finger marks on her arms and a black eye. She says you two were arguing before you left. I want you to come in and talk to me about what happened."

"I didn't hit her. I wouldn't do that." He blurted it out. No matter what had happened, he didn't want Dr. Sherman to think he was capable of that. He sat down and tried to compose himself. Elizabeth hadn't done anything wrong, but damn it, if it weren't a mess. He needed a moment to absorb the enormity of it all.

"A social worker has already spoken to your children, Henry. This is serious. Can you come in this afternoon?"

He sighed. God, he had fucked this up. "Yeah. I can. Of course."

"Will you be safe driving back?"

"I'll be fine. Are she and the kids okay?"

"They're shaken up, but they'll be fine. But let's wait until we talk to get in touch with them, okay?"

* * *

><p>Henry sat across from Dr. Sherman in her office a few hours later. She had offered him water, but he declined.<p>

"Henry, I have pictures that were taken of Elizabeth at the hospital. There are bruises on her arms. Can you tell me how they got there?"

"I grabbed her."

"You grabbed her?"

"Yes."

"Why would you do that?"

"She wasn't listening to me." Henry thought it was obvious.

"Why do you say that?" Dr. Sherman was probing.

"I didn't want her to listen to me. She wouldn't have understood anyway," he spat out, bitterly. Henry didn't know how to explain himself to Dr. Sherman. He wasn't even sure what had happened during the last two days.

"She's a pretty smart woman. What wouldn't she have understood?"

"I was just so angry," Henry felt a crushing weight of guilt settle in his stomach.

"Is that why you hurt her?"

He looked at the therapist sharply, but his voice was devoid of any emotion. "I didn't mean to hurt her," at least not physically.

Dr. Sherman sighed. "Henry, why don't you tell me what happened from the beginning?"

"Yeah. I was just so angry," I couldn't control it anymore.

Elizabeth went behind my back. I was just trying to do my job. And I guess I kind of went behind her back, too. But she just couldn't see that she had screwed me over. So I grabbed her. I didn't mean to cause those bruises. I just didn't realize how hard I was gripping her."

"What happened then?"

"Iâ€¦ I pushed her into the wall. But she was fine." Henry was trying to rationalize his actions.

"Would you have been fine, if you had been her?" Dr. Sherman asked.

Henry looked up, somewhat surprised. "No. I would have been terrified." He hadn't thought of it before.

"How did she respond?"

"Umâ€¦ She tried to calm me downâ€¦" Now he felt even guiltier.

"What happened then?"

"I said a lot of things. I called her some names, and I think I told her to fuck offâ€¦ I told her I was done. I told her she could just figure things out on her own. Then I left."

"Was that how it happened?" Dr. Sherman was confused. It didn't quite add up.

Henry looked off to his left. "Wellâ€¦ She called after me. She wanted me to stay. I saw a glass on the table, and I looked her in the eye, and I smashed it."

Dr. Sherman inhaled sharply. "You broke the glass?"

"Yeah. Iâ€¦ I don't know what I was thinking. I told her I wanted her to figure out how to do it on her own." Henry couldn't look at Dr. Sherman now. "So I broke the glass and slammed the door on her."

Kinsey Sherman cleared her throat, and evened her notes against her lap. "Henry, what you did two days ago was assault and battery. Elizabeth has enough evidence to press charges against you if she wanted to. There's no getting around that." She needed Henry to realize how severe his actions had been.

He stood up, looking out the window. "It doesn't change anything, but I'm sorry." The words came out of his mouth, but he wasn't quite sure if he meant them or not. He really hadn't intended to get physical with Elizabeth, but part of him knew that he had intended to hurt her.

"I think that will matter a great deal to your wife." Kinsey smiled, unaware of Henry's turmoil.

A/N: I know comments aren't posting right now, but I am getting them, and I appreciate all your feedback!

Chapter five might take me another few days. I'm presenting the first part of my thesis tomorrow, and so I'm a little busy.

As I mentioned last chapter, you should go tweet at Madam Secretary to get them to include audio descriptions... Be a good internet citizen.

* * *

><p>Henry sat on a chair as Dr. Sherman led Elizabeth in to sit on the sofa. This was the first time Henry had seen her since he had stormed out of their house. Her swollen, black eye stood out starkly. If she had been anyone else, he would have tried to figure out who had hurt her, too. She still had small bandages keeping the cut on her forehead covered. He was glad to see that she was wearing a sweater. He couldn't see the marks that he knew were on her arms. Dr. Sherman had already shown him pictures taken of Elizabeth at the hospital, not that he had spent too much time looking at them.<p>

"Alright, Elizabeth, have a seat. Henry's going to stay over there." Dr. Sherman wanted to make sure her patient felt comfortable meeting her partner again after he had hurt her.

"It's alright. I'm not worried." _Should I be?_

Elizabeth sat down smartly. Her appearance was casual, since she had just gotten released from the hospital, but she still somehow managed to command a presence. When she walked into a room, everyone could sense it.

"Good. Well, it sounds like you two have had quite the time of it the last few days."

Henry and Elizabeth stared at the therapist blankly. What were they supposed to say to that statement?

"I'd like to start with the report I got from the hospital, if that's okay with you." Dr. Sherman wanted to break the ice a bit without forcing either of them to talk too soon.

The couple in front of her nodded in unison.

"After speaking with Elizabeth, her doctor made a recommendation for some intervention. No one is obligated to do anything, but I strongly encourage you two to start meeting with me together. I think it would do you both a lot of good, and we can all agree that this is something we don't want to repeat." The suggestion for couples' therapy was sometimes welcome, and sometimes it was met with hostility. Kinsey wasn't quite sure how it would be received in this situation.

Elizabeth nodded. "I agree." She glanced to her husband. He was looking out the window.

"Yeah. I'm in." Henry didn't want to look at his wife, but his eyes were drawn to her. When their eyes met, he quickly looked down, as if

he had been burned.

Dr. Sherman smiled. At least they had acknowledged each other. It was a start. "Great. I'm glad to hear it." She genuinely was glad. She wanted to see the people in front of her come out on the other side of their disagreement. "Now, a counselor also spoke with your children. Overall, she gave a positive report. She did mention that the kids should have access to counseling if they wanted it. Are you both comfortable bringing that up with them?"

Henry sighed. He definitely had not intended to hurt his kids. He nodded. He would make sure they were okay, and if that included counseling, he would make sure they had everything they needed.

Bess stared at the door, decidedly not looking at Henry. He would never be able to understand the shame she had felt at having a counselor speak to her children with the purpose of finding out if they had been abused. She may have also felt more than a little guilty that because of her, and because of her inability to keep her marriage together, her kids had gotten hurt.

"Elizabeth?" Dr. Sherman could see she was no longer present.

She snapped back to reality. "Of course. I'll talk to them tonight. Did the counselor mention anything else?"

"No. She thinks you are both responsible parents, but she recommended early intervention before the situation gets more worrisome."

"So what does this intervention look like?" Henry leaned in to the conversation, engaged for the first time.

Kinsey was pleased. "Well, I want to facilitate some open and honest communication. I want you two to have the opportunity to talk to each other. Before two days ago, when was the last time you had a conversation about your relationship?"

Henry sat back in his chair and crossed his arms. He was trying to remember when he had last truly spoken to Elizabeth, but truth was, he couldn't remember. That made him mad.

Glancing around a bit, Elizabeth offered, "It's been a while, I guess."

Dr. Sherman didn't seem surprised. "I think if you both have a chance to talk regularly about the things that bother you, you won't get as upset. I'm thinking you're putting too much pressure on each conversation just because they're so few and far between. Does that sound about right?"

They both nodded, not looking at each other.

"Good. So we'll work on opening up those lines of communication. Then, we're also going to need to address the hostility and anger that's happening." Not to mention the violence.

Elizabeth felt uncomfortable. "It was just this once." She wanted people to stop acting as if Henry were some kind of monster. He was still the man she had known for nearly thirty years and the man with whom she wanted to spend her life—she just didn't want to look at

him right now.

"No, Elizabeth. It wasn't. Maybe you think it was just this once, but that's because you haven't been paying attention." Henry finally spoke, his words low and harsh. He was still looking out the window, refusing to make eye contact.

She startled a little at the sound of his voice. _Please Henry, don't rake me over the coals again. Not here. Not in front of Dr. Sherman._

Dr. Sherman could tell how uncomfortable Elizabeth was with Henry's words. "Elizabeth? Why does that upset you?"

She didn't know what to say.

"Be honest. That's the only way we're going to be able to fix anything." Kinsey wanted to get through to Elizabeth.

Bess sighed, and responded quietly. "I guessâ€¦ I don't want Henry to criticize me in front of anyone."

"And why is that?" Dr. Sherman probed.

"I don't want anyone to thinkâ€¦ I don't want people to think that Henry is angry. I'm not in any danger. My kids aren't in any danger. Henry's not a bad person." She was fed up with the amount of questions she had gotten at the hospital. Every nurse who had come in to check on her had asked her some version of the same question. _Is your husband abusive?_ They were waiting for her to slip up and say that he was. She should have been glad that the hospital was so on top of a possible case of domestic abuse, but she couldn't bring herself to care about other women. Not when her husband was being characterized as a monster.

"Do you think that is what people think when Henry criticizes you?"

"When I have bruises on my arms, of course that's what everyone is thinking." Elizabeth let out a short, barking laugh.

Henry turned to his wife. "Could Iâ€¦ Would you let me see? I want to see." His voice was softer now. His face was open.

Elizabeth was surprised. She nodded silently, and took off her gray sweater. She was wearing a sleeveless blouse underneath, and the mottled brown and blue bruises stood out against her skin.

"Can Iâ€¦" Henry looked at Dr. Sherman, then back to Elizabeth. "Do you mind?" He started to get up.

Dr. Sherman nodded, even though Henry was no longer looking at her. Elizabeth was. She seemed a little worried. Kinsey was pleased that Henry wanted to acknowledge what he had done.

Henry knelt in front of Elizabeth, slightly off to the side. He reached up slowly to trace a finger along her arm. "I didn't mean to hurt you, babe. I didn't mean to push you." He looked at the floor, unable to meet her gaze.

She reached out her hand under his chin, bringing his face up so she could look at him. "I know you didn't mean it. I never thought you did. You're just hurting."

He got up swiftly and moved back to the window. Silence filled the room.

Dr. Sherman took a deep breath. He hadn't lashed out at Elizabeth. At least that was good. However, him keeping his emotions bottled up to the point of explosion was just the thing that landed them in their current predicament. "Henry, why does that bother you?"

"I'm fine. I don't need her looking after me." His voice trembled slightly, but he tried to keep his words even.

"It seems to me like you've had a really eventful past few months. I'd be surprised if you didn't need to talk to your wife about some of it. You've started a new job that's stressful, and you've lost a parent" Dr. Sherman wasn't sure how far she could push him. She didn't want to have any big dramatic emotional outbursts in this session. In fact, she liked to avoid them altogether, but she certainly didn't want to provoke something in their first couples' session.

"We do talk. I've dealt with it." He knew he was trying to convince himself now.

Dr. Sherman had to restrain herself not to roll her eyes. "Ten minutes ago, you two told me that you hadn't had a real conversation in a long while."

Elizabeth stood up. "Henry" She took a step towards him.

He still wouldn't look at her. His eyes were fixed on a spot outside.

A few tears started to fall, no matter how hard she tried to keep them in. "I love you." Elizabeth reached out a hand to her husband. She wasn't even sure if he could see her. Her eyes flicked back up to see him still looking out the window.

After a beat, she felt him reach back to take her hand in his. His grip was loose, but at least they were still connected.

5. Chapter 5

Go tweet.

I make no promises about how this story is going to end, just to be clear... Although I am hoping to have it done before 2.20.

I mean, I could tell you what is going to happen. Chapter 6 is written. But I want to keep you in suspense because I'm super evil. At least I have a plan for how to finish this fic now. These last few chapters have been written, and then I have no idea what to do with the next chapter until the plot fairy visits again.

Again, my thanks to Broadwayfreak for the beta work and inspiration.

* * *

><p>Following their appointment with Dr. Sherman, Henry and Elizabeth returned home. The kids were at school, and Elizabeth was somewhat grateful for that. She needed to plan how to discuss what had happened with them.<p>

When they had entered the house, Henry had gone straight upstairs to put away his things. Elizabeth stayed downstairs in their shared office so she could answer work emails. She wasn't going to go into work with her eye still being so noticeable. She was surprised at how productive she was. When she sat down and focused on work, she was able to ignore everything else going on, and it let to quite a bit of work getting done. It wasn't normally her style to spend hours behind a computer, but her reputation stood behind her email signature, and she was pleased at her effectiveness.

Henry sat on their bed upstairs watching television. He wasn't truly paying attention, but it was a welcome distraction. Sitting in their bedroom was distracting enough. The last time he had been there, he and Elizabeth were not in this mess. He had not scared her. He had not hurt her. And he had not given the world a reason to question his ability to control himself. The quiet time was important for him to relax and collect himself. He had to process his thoughts.

After a couple hours of watching _I Love Lucy _reruns, Henry's stomach rumbled. He looked at his watch and realized it was nearly three o'clock, and he hadn't eaten all day. He guessed Elizabeth hadn't, either. Slowly, he got up and went downstairs to find his wife.

He found her still working away on the computer. She looked so professional, aside from the injuries on her face. She was concentrating, and she was confident. Confidence was not something she lacked, as a rule.

"I'm going to make something to eat. Would you like something? A sandwich? Leftover lasagna?"

"I'm fine." She was still typing away at her computer.

"Elizabeth, you're going to need to eat." He felt a need to look after her, particularly after what he had done.

She looked away from her computer and closed the laptop. "Alright. You're right. Um, let's go see what we can find for lunch."

Henry wanted to lean in and kiss her. He wanted to reassure her that he still cared. He wanted to apologize somehow. The shame was starting to really take hold of his psyche. As angry as he still was, he was not a violent man. It was central to his beliefs that there had to be significant ethical motivation for one person to hurt another. He had violated his own beliefs. He had also demonstrated that he was not professional â€" he was not in control. That's what it all went back to; control.

Maybe the reason he wanted to hurt her was he wanted to control her in some way. She had taken an opposing position concerning Talia, and he disagreed with it. He wished he could changer her stance, but he

couldn't. But he could try to control her in some way.

Henry opened the fridge, still in thought. "Looks like we've got stuff for a turkey sandwich. That work for you?"

Elizabeth nodded. She reached out to touch her husband's shoulder. She needed to feel connected to him again. Her confidence in her ability to read him had been severely shaken. Touching him physically was a way for her to read him better than just looking at him or trying to sense his emotions. His shoulders were tense, and she could tell, but he felt solid. He wasn't trying to get away from her. He still wanted to be with her, and at the moment, that was all she cared about.

Speaking out loud her need to reconnect with her husband was too complex for the moment. Elizabeth hunted around her mind for something to say. She wanted Henry to know that she still wanted to make this work. She wasn't quite sure if she had forgiven him or not, at least not yet—but she still wanted it to work. She didn't think the relationship was over.

"We'll need to talk to the kids tonight. Give them the opportunity to see Dr. Sherman if they want."

"You think we should bring that up before dinner? Or during?" Henry did want to make sure his kids had the support they needed.

"I don't think it matters too much. Whenever it comes up is fine. It doesn't need to be too orchestrated." Elizabeth was not anticipating the conversation being too difficult.

Henry got out plates for their sandwiches. "How were they at the hospital? How did they react to the social worker?" _Do they think I might hurt them?_

"They were—" Elizabeth wasn't sure what to tell him. The kids had been upset. Of course they had been upset. "Ali cried. She and Jason were pretty angry that anyone would think you—" I mean—" That you had—"

"That I hit you, you mean." Henry's voice was even and low. He was spreading mustard on bread.

"You didn't hit me." That distinction was very important to Elizabeth.

"No. I didn't. But they think I did."

"The kids don't. They didn't believe it. They asked me if you had, but they were just worried and scared." _Their mother was in the hospital after having been found unconscious. Of course they were upset. This was not unexpected._

"Scared of me, you mean." Henry set the plate down in front of Elizabeth a little harder than was necessary. It made a loud noise against the counter.

"Henry." She looked up sharply. "They weren't scared of you. They were worried about me! I was lying in bed with my eye swollen shut. Stevie found me unconscious—" Tears started to form behind her

eyelids. The whole thing was just humiliating.

"Exactly. They thought I had done that to youâ€¦" Guilt mixed with anger in his voice.

Elizabeth wanted them to be able to move past the incident. She just wanted to forget it. "Babe, you didn't mean it. You didn't mean it. You were incredibly stressed. Russell asks too much of you. You shouldn't have been put in that position in the first placeâ€¦"

_Why do you have to keep telling him that it wasn't my fault? _She was trying to make him feel better, he knew. But it didn't help at all. _You think I couldn't stand up to Russell? You think I couldn't see past my own problems to do my job?_

"Would you stop saying that?! I can handle myself!" Henry was getting angry again.

"A lot has happened. Let me help. I want to help. Just let me in." The sincerity in her voice was obvious.

Henry turned to the sink, rinsing his hands of crumbs. He needed to get away from this conversation. He just wasn't ready to listen to this. She didn't understand him at all. She thought she could fix everything because she was so fucking special.

His emotions must have shown on his face because Elizabeth turned away from him and he could tell she was trying unsuccessfully to hold back her tears.

_Damn it. Why do you make everything about you? _Her tears angered him even more.

"Look at me." He grabbed her hand roughly and whipped her around to look at him.

Her face registered pain at being handled so harshly. Her shoulder felt jarred. A slight fear crept into her eyes. Henry noticed.

He reached up to grab her chin, wrapping his fingers around her neck. He wasn't thinking anymore. The anger had taken over him. Adrenaline pumped through him, making him feel simultaneously ten feet tall and ten miles away. He could anticipate her every movement.

"Henryâ€¦" Her voice was laced with apprehension. Tears started to fall in earnest. He had terrified her. _Maybe it wasn't a one-time thing._

"Shut up. You want me to talk to you? Let's talk." He tightened his grip on her neck. "You think I didn't mean to hurt you? I did. You deserved it. You deserved every bit of it for what you did to Talia." His voice was dangerously low.

Elizabeth's eyes widened in shock. _He meant to hurt her. He meant to push her?_ _How could Henryâ€¦ So calm and steadyâ€¦? _

She started to cry, practically crumpling to the floor. She had misjudged him. Maybe he _was_ a danger to her and her children. And she had missed it. She had put her kids in danger. Just because she was blinded by love for a man who no longer stood in front of her.

The Henry she married would not have hurt her intentionally. He wouldn't have stood for that.

Henry could feel her fall away from his hold as she slid down the side of the kitchen island. She was crouched down, hugging her knees, sobbing loudly. Her face was buried in her arms, away from his sight. She was trembling, obviously in fear. He had scared her. She was worried about her physical safety.

Time seemed to move differently. Images seemed choppy. He felt like he was looking at a series of pictures instead of a steady progression of moments.

The adrenaline soured in his veins at the sight of his wife horrified by his presence. He looked down at his hands.

_Oh God, what have I done? _

6. Chapter 6

A/N: I'll make a deal with you. I'm going to post the rest of this story all at once if you review each chapter individually. Deal? Cool. I really love how thoughtful some of the reviews I've gotten have been. It helps me improve.

I'm going to include an afterword at the end of this story. I want to make sure that anyone who wants some help interpreting my intentions with this story has it. I'm not convinced I've sufficiently related all the points I wanted to make. So I wrote up some notes on how I intended this story to come off.

* * *

><p>Henry tried to approach his wife. She was curled up on the floor, rocking back and forth slowly. Tears still streamed down her face. Her nose was red, and her skin was puffy. He couldn't read her expression. She had closed off to him. Where he could normally read her so well, she had chosen to stop sharing herself with him.<p>

"Baby, I'm so sorry. I didn't meanâ€¦ Did I hurt you?" He tried to look at her neck to see if he had left a mark. He couldn't believe he had done this again. This wasn't even shaking her and pushing her. He could have choked her. It scared him what he could have done to her.

Seeing where he was looking, Elizabeth didn't want to let Henry see her neck. She didn't want him to see that he had hurt her. Her pain belonged to her alone. She stayed on the floor, but looked up at him with tired eyes.

"Get out." Her voice was cold and quiet.

Henry couldn't have heard her correctly. "What?"

"I said get out. We're done. Leave."

"Elizabeth, honey, let's talk about this." _I can't have fucked it up this bad. I need one more chance._

"No, Henry. We're not going to talk about it anymore. Pack a bag and leave right now. I'll send your things once you're set." Her voice was firm and steady, even as tears still fell from her eyes. There was no hint of tremor in her resolve. She was still curled up on the floor. Her muscles were tense. She was a tightly coiled spring, compressed to the point of collapse, and yet she refused to give in to Henry's force.

"Pleaseâ€|" He started crying himself. _This can't be happening. Don't do this._

"If you aren't out of here in half an hour, I'm calling the police. Get out, Henry." _Don't prolong this. Don't make it more difficult._

Guilt overtook him. Tears poured down his cheeks. He walked up the stairs, thinking that it might be the last time he would ever walk up those stairs. _How have I managed to get things to this point?_ _I never intended to let it get this bad. I wish I could take it back._

He packed his bag on autopilot. He took only casual clothes, subconsciously knowing that he would not be returning to work at the Murphy Station. This chapter of his life was over. In the course of two days, he had destroyed nearly thirty years worth of trust. Twenty minutes later, he found himself standing at the bottom of the stairs with his duffel bag. It struck him that this was the end. This was the last time he'd see any of this home.

He'd never see their bed messy from a night of passion again. He'd never hear Elizabeth singing in the shower. Her shoes lying on the floor would never trip him up in the middle of the night. He wouldn't have to buy multiple pints of ice cream every week anymore. The smell of perfume and floral shampoo wouldn't linger on his sheets. He wouldn't have a reason to rustle up a date night on short notice. The ring on his finger would lose its significance until he would one day decide to take it off.

In the midst of his reflection, a thought struck him. Would she take off her ring, too? She would. He knew it. But for some reason, that struck him as more difficult to bear. He couldn't protect her. No one would know that she was connected to him. _She wouldn't be connected to me, anymore._ It may be irrational, but he felt as if he had been able to protect her just by her wearing his ring on her hand. He didn't want her to go into the world alone. He knew what horrors the world held. It occurred to him that he was worried other men would treat her with the same disrespect he had shown her. He hadn't managed to protect her at all. He couldn't even protect her from himself. That should have been his first and most basic priority.

He saw her sitting down. "Can I call you?" He felt so much smaller now. His power and anger were gone. Elizabeth held the cards now. She was dictating how this situation was going to unfold. The tables had turned. He had made her feel weak and scared, and now she was the one with the control. Of course, his lack of control was what had gotten him in this mess.

He needed one last hope of salvaging his marriage. His eyes pleaded with Elizabeth, who had gathered her strength while he was upstairs.

She was no longer crying. She sat in a chair positioned so she could see the front door and the stairs simultaneously. He looked at her, but she met his gaze with cold indifference. He expected to see the pain he knew this was causing her, but he didn't. Her face was impassive. She didn't want to share her emotions with him. He didn't have a right to them anymore. Access to her was something he had had to earn through trust. They shared themselves incrementally, built upon the dignity and respect they found in each other. Henry had broken that, and he was no longer entitled to a justification.

"No. I don't think that would be appropriate. I'll have divorce papers sent to you tomorrow. You can speak with the lawyer." It was the first time either had said the word divorce. She was surprised it didn't upset her more. It was necessary. She was convinced. Not that she liked it, of course. She couldn't imagine how she was going to survive the next few days, let alone the next few weeks, but she knew she would survive. The divorce didn't upset her. What upset her was her misjudgment of Henry. He had disappointed her. She had disappointed herself. Her primary feeling was of sadness that her marriage was over. She would need to grieve the loss, but she understood that her decision was warranted.

"Would you let me—" Henry made one final appeal.

Elizabeth cut him off. "Your thirty minutes are up. You need to leave. Goodbye, Henry." She stood up and placed her hand on the small of his back, just as he had done to her so many times. When Henry had done it, he had meant it as a gesture of comfort and protection. How many parties had they attended where a hand on her back demonstrated that they were a couple? That they were connected? Not now, though. That hand on his back was firmly directing him out of the door and out of her life. Once he was out the door, it shut with quick finality. It occurred to him that the door to their home was solid and strong. If they had not had agents there, the door alone would have proved to be a significant barrier. It kept the world outside of their home. They had their own little bubble. They had had their own little bubble. Henry was on the other side of the door now. Elizabeth was inside. The door protected her, but now instead of being protected from the outside, the door protected her from Henry. Now he was the outside threat. Once he had become a threat to her in the sanctuary of her own home, he was removed. It was that simple.

Henry felt lost. Where would he go? It didn't matter to him much, but he realized he needed to find something to do with himself. After taking a breath, he got in the car and started driving. He wasn't sure where he would end up, but he figured by the time he got out of DC, he would think of something. Elizabeth had made it very clear that she wanted him out. It didn't occur to him to defy her, not when she was as sincere as she had been. In his shocked state, all he could do was follow her instructions. Leave. Get out.

It was indeed time for Henry to leave. His presence was no longer welcome. Their marriage was finished.

7. Chapter 7

A/N: Here's the last chapter! Thanks for staying with me to the end! Please review and let me know what you think.

The next chapter will be the notes on interpretation that I mentioned. I encourage you to take the time to read those. I would love to get your feedback. I'm raising a lot of questions.

* * *

><p>Ten Years Later

Their divorce had gone quickly and smoothly, or as quickly and smoothly as any divorce could go. Henry had returned to live in Pittsburgh in his childhood home, surrounded by family. He taught at a local university there. It was definitely a step down from Georgetown or the War College, but he didn't risk running into Elizabeth on the street.

Elizabeth had finished out President Dalton's term as Secretary of State. Her staff noticed she didn't seem to laugh as much as she had before, but she never seemed to regret her decision. After the term ended, she stayed in DC to teach at GWU. She still travelled frequently to do guest lectures and interviews around the country. She had written a couple books, and was now consulting on the editorial board for an international relations textbook. The intellectual challenge was very gratifying for her.

The kids had been shocked. Elizabeth often tried to remember back to the conversation where she had informed the kids that their parents were divorcing, but the memories weren't there. Stevie was already of age at the time, so custody hearings didn't apply to her, and she was grateful for the autonomy she had, though it often put her in a difficult position. Her parents still loved her, and they tried not to judge her decisions. She had finished her degree at Georgetown, and even got her law degree there. She and Jareth had gotten married when she finished undergrad, and they now had a son, with another on the way.

Ali had only had to live with the custody arrangements for less than a year. She would go up to see her dad on scheduled weekends. There was always a court-appointed supervisor there to make sure her dad didn't respond violently to her. She hated those meetings. When she turned eighteen, she was able to visit her dad whenever she wanted, and without the unnerving presence of the supervisor.

Jason was the most affected by his parents' divorce arrangements. He had to struggle with only limited visits to his dad for nearly four years. Henry had tried very hard to teach his son all the things he thought he needed to know, but both men would admit that it was desperately difficult. Elizabeth had stepped into the role of single parent very adeptly, with possible exception that the family now ate out much more frequently. After high school, Jason had chosen to follow his dad's footsteps and enlist in the Marine Corps. Before the divorce, he would never have dreamed of enlisting, but after the divorce, it seemed like the simplest and most natural thing to do.

Stevie was about to be a mother for the second time, Ali had developed a very successful magazine business, and Jason was just finishing up a rotation abroad and was heading into officer training. They had turned out pretty well. All of them had.

Elizabeth's feelings in the intervening ten years, between her telling Henry to leave and the present, had evolved somewhat. She had refused to speak to her former husband. She spoke only through her lawyer. Dr. Sherman had been an invaluable resource for the first few months after the divorce. Elizabeth knew she had done the right thing. She had needed to ensure that her children were safe. If she had forgiven Henry one more time, his next outburst might have targeted one of the children. And while they were young adults at the time, Elizabeth still needed to protect them. Even if she had been willing to subject herself to Henry's treatment, she could not put her children in that position. She was their guardian. They were not old enough to make that decision for themselves, and she had to use her judgment. It had been the best call she could make.

She also needed to protect herself. It had not been difficult to get her injuries documented and admitted into evidence for the divorce. Bruises of handprints on your neck turned out to be pretty convincing to a judge. They hadn't drug out a battle over money, but the judge was more than inclined to make sure she had plenty of resources to support the children since she was given custody.

Elizabeth had not remarried, and neither had Henry. She had dated a few times since leaving her position at the State Department, but none of the relationships had gone anywhere. She kept trying to recreate her relationship with Henry, and it just didn't work. In most aspects of her life, she had been able to move on, but not when it came to dating. She had even managed to teach herself to sleep alone after only a week, but dating was a different entity altogether. A part of her would always feel like she was replacing Henry by being in a relationship with another man.

Maybe it was Henry's Catholicism that made her feel like being with any other men would be wrong. She never identified too heavily with religion, but since Henry was no longer around, she realized it mattered to her more in his absence. Her difficulty may also have stemmed from the unique parts of their relationship. She had never felt more connected to another person, and she never had since. She wasn't even entirely sure if she wanted to find another partner. At first, it had seemed like finding another husband was a goal that would demonstrate she was over Henry, but after a while, she had started questioning that. Henry had been a great part of her life, but she was able to find contentment in being single, too.

Once the kids had moved out, life had changed. When her time as Secretary of State was over, she had given up the Secretary's residence in Georgetown. She had found a small townhouse with a couple extra bedrooms for the kids when they visited, but she had appreciated the chance to downsize. It would have been difficult for her to stay in the Georgetown residence, as big as it was, when she was by herself. That house would always be saturated with memories of Henry. His personality had filled the space.

Henry had not attempted any new relationships. Guilt still filled his existence. Two days. Two days. He had forced Elizabeth to kick him out in only two days. After a lot of personal reflection, he was able to acknowledge that she was not completely blameless, but blame was such an unhelpful construct, he had realized. She had said things and made choices politically that were questionable, but he had physically hurt her, and none of her actions justified his. Truth be told, he was afraid of starting another relationship. He didn't want

to put himself in the position of hurting anyone. There had been some pretty dark times, that was for sure. Henry couldn't dwell on those times, though. He loved spending time with his children, and now, grandchildren. That made his life worth it, even in the midst of his guilt and regret. It wasn't that he hadn't managed to be successful after his marriage. Objectively, he had. He had published new books and developed new courses, probably directly from the personal revelations he had about violence. Even so, he just didn't feel like another relationship was appropriate for him. He still felt that he had unfinished business with Elizabeth, even if he had been forced to make his peace with it.

It happened that he was sent to a conference being held at Georgetown. He had tried to avoid this particular conference because the trip to DC would be so difficult for him. Ten years after his divorce, though, he figured he should be able to spend two days in the same city as his ex-wife without dropping dead. He knew the memories would come flooding back, but he hoped that he could demonstrate to himself that he was his own man again.

After a particularly dull panel discussing the definition of "off the cuff" remarks and their relation to the Magisterium, Henry decided to go grab a coffee before heading back to the conference. It hadn't occurred to him that his feet had taken him to a coffee house he had visited with Elizabeth countless times. It was familiar. He was in an old environment, and this was natural in that environment.

He got his coffee, but as he turned to leave, he saw a woman sitting on a stool at the bar table facing out the window. He would have recognized her anywhere, but he certainly recognized her because she was sitting next to a man who was twice her size. The man wore a dark coat and a very specific lapel pin. He walked behind her, without her noticing him. She was concentrating on scrolling through her phone, probably checking emails. She was in a coffee house, but she had no coffee.

Henry stepped up to her elbow and cleared his throat softly. "Would you let meâ€¦ Would you let me buy you a coffee?"

Elizabeth looked up from her phone, surprised to hear that voice again after ten years. She would remember it for the rest of her life. That voice had written poetry on her heart that she would never forget.

She smiled. She was pleased. After all these yearsâ€¦ maybe. Just maybe.

"I would. I'd like that very much."

8. Chapter 8

Some notes:

This is not part of the story. This is basically a series of extended bullet points that provide context for the story. I hope you will take the time to read this, but there won't be any further developments to the story. There will be explanations, though.

Spoiler alert, though I've tried not to give away the surprising plot points.

I know it's a little weird for an author to tell people how to interpret their work or what you're "supposed" to think about it. However, I'm going to offer some of my thoughts behind this story. I am a fanfiction author, and I worry that my amateur writing skills might obscure some of the things I want to convey, so I will explain them. Why paint a picture with a fine paintbrush when you can use a roller? Subtlety isn't helpful if it isn't effective.

I don't want you to think that I'm trying to change anyone's mind about this story. I know people will dislike it by the fact that it's a thing in the world. Nothing is universally liked. It's important to bring a diversity of opinions to the table, and this story is only one. I am also doing a fair amount of manipulation with this story. I have an agenda, and I am specifically directing you to certain issues. I am promoting my understanding of the world by developing the story as I have. I know many people will be uncomfortable with such blatant emotional manipulation. That's very fair. I don't think I would have written this story five years ago, for example. The thought of committing emotional manipulation myself would have weighed on me too heavily. But please also recognize that every story you read has an agenda. Most of the stories that we have in Madam Secretary glorify normativity, heterosexuality, and monogamy. Hell, this story glorifies heterosexual monogamy. That isn't necessarily bad at all, but it is making a social statement. My story is also making a social statement. I'm very pleased that I've gotten critical reviews because it tells me that I've forced engagement with difficult issues. If I'm going to write a story like this, I want it to offer enough originality to the point that some people dislike it. This is not fluff, and it is not meant to be fluff.

I may need to apologize. I did not necessarily consider that by posting chapters separately, I changed the reception of the story. I think it needs to be read as a whole. It is critical to have Elizabeth's response shown. I probably should have taken that into more consideration, and I understand that posting it bit by bit without context may have been jarring to folks. I apologize for that. I want to think more about how the story changes when it is delivered in segments instead of as a whole. I might decide to repost it as one chapter if I decide that it is not conscionable to break it up. I will say when I wrote the first chapter that I was not necessarily planning on continuing it at all. But then more ideas kept coming to me, and I wanted to explore them. My style is to write and post very rapidly, but in this case, I might have been better served by holding the story until I felt it was completed. One of the things I love about fanfiction is our ability to address things so quickly. I love being able to have responses to episodes up within a matter of hours. I think it helps us process things as a group, and that builds community. In this case, I also wanted to post the story before the next episode comes out and makes it completely obsolete. It is difficult for me to remember exactly what we knew from the previous episode after seeing the new episode. I didn't want to have to make hundreds of small revisions to take into account the new plot. So I posted it very quickly partially out of laziness.

I also take very seriously the charge that I glorify domestic violence. I have not intended to do that. I have attempted to write a story that makes you think about your personal definition of "too

far." I want you to work that out for yourself. Know that domestic violence is never okay. It is never justified. There are resources available to help you out of dangerous situations, and I want you to utilize them. If you need help identifying these resources, please feel free to contact me. If you take nothing else away from this fic, please understand that no matter what you do, no one has the right to harm you. There is no situation in which you would be guilty for another person's violence. You do not have to be free of all wrongdoing to be a victim. Choosing to commit an act of violence is solely the responsibility of the individual. There may be countless intervening variables, but the responsibility still lies with the individual. Go look up transcripts from the Nuremberg trials if you want to hear this argued fully. The commentary on those trials is something that should be required reading for any modern study of ethics.

Other actions done by Person A on the encouragement of Person B may not be the responsibility of Person A. For instance, if Person B offers to sell Person A some beach front real estate in Florida that turns out to be swamp land, I do not believe that Person A should be held responsible for being misled. Person A did not commit a violation of ethics by purchasing land. Violence is a different ballgame to me, particularly physical violence.

This is the HBO of fics. I never claimed it wasn't fucked up. It is fucked up, actually. It's supposed to be fucked up. I never claimed that strangling your wife was acceptable. It is super, super not acceptable. Don't strangle people. Don't get drunk on your own power and forget the effect you have on others. How you use your privilege is your responsibility. Henry's actions here are unethical, illegal, and OOC. On the show, he has a tendency to bottle things up, though, and I wanted to explore that. For some reason, I'm a little obsessed with Henry being violently angry. I think it's because he represents so many things antithetical to violence, but he also has the background as a fighter pilot. I haven't quite been able to personally come to terms with that, yet.

Do I glorify domestic violence? I'm going to argue no. Here's why. Elizabeth realistically denies what's going on. That is very typical with domestic violence victims, and it's important to acknowledge that. I'm also trying to explore what you do when a tendency to violence is seemingly the only thing wrong with a relationship. Do you try to salvage it? He didn't outright beat her. Of course what he did was wrong, but it wasn't quite as cut and dry and the typical domestic violence situation is portrayed. I've specifically toned down the violence to make it seem at first like not a big deal. I want to trouble the line of what domestic violence is. We think of it as outright beatings, but this story is very much domestic violence even though there aren't any beatings. I want this to seem kinda benign until you realize that it isn't benign at all. Because no one is going to tell you right before they manipulate you that something not okay is about to happen. No one is going to draw that line for you. You need to draw that line for yourself, and it is desperately hard to do. If you are ever in that position, you will have trouble with it, and I want to show that even a strong female character whose role is to buck gender stereotypes will have trouble identifying domestic violence and responding to it. Feminists can be victims of domestic violence. People who study domestic violence can be victims. It is one thing to objectively see cases and identify domestic violence, but it is another entirely to live that experience.

I'm showing Henry as relatable and human because abusers are human, and that's important. We have a tendency to turn abusers into animals or monsters. Ignoring their humanity makes it more difficult to identify real life abusers who are polished and professional. I want you to identify with him in some ways. I want you to feel uncomfortable that you are identifying with a guy who hurts his wife.

To clarify, Elizabeth does remember what happened. But she has no idea how to tell Henry that it wasn't okay. Her strategy is to convince herself he didn't mean to do it. Because maybe he didn't. Maybe he did. I'm leaving that line up to interpretation. There is also a sense of fear about confronting him about it. She can't know if he'd react violently or not. So she would wait a few days to talk about it until he had demonstrably cooled down. She desperately wants to keep her marriage alive, and so she would want to try to keep the situation from becoming any more volatile. She wants to keep him from reacting violently. In some ways, she knows she has made some mistakes, and she blames herself for making Henry treat her violently. Of course he was not justified, but that is how many victims of domestic violence feel. Self-blame is powerful and incredibly pervasive. That would keep her from calling Henry out immediately. Potentially trading Talia for whatever motivation she has is difficult. Elizabeth would feel guilty about it, and Henry was capitalizing on that guilt. And to be fair, she hasn't been blameless in their relationship trouble this season.

I think in the scope of things, Elizabeth stands up for herself very well. If you are in a domestic violence situation and you kick the person to the curb after two significant incidents, not to mention going to therapy after only one incident, you're doing better than most any domestic violence victim I know. Because this is fanfiction, the timeline has been greatly condensed.

I want to apologize in some ways for what I call the "Pygmalion ending." I want to challenge the identity of the domestic abuser. Can they change? Can they learn? That's up to you. I think Elizabeth's character would give him the chance of coffee again. I'm not going to speculate beyond that. I want you to judge for yourself what you think she would do. I think that will be more personally enlightening for you. Also, I'm not sure I've decided what she would do. I think it is odd that we choose some actions (rape, domestic violence, etc.) and say that committing those crimes changes a person's identity, that they will always be defined as a person capable of those actions. As if they weren't capable of those actions before they did them, which doesn't make sense. Or maybe it does, depends on how you look at the world. Either you think the potential for something is always there, or you think the act of doing the thing creates the potential for it. We hold that other crimes besides violence can be rehabilitated. No one would say that someone who got a speeding ticket is a separate class of human, and yet that is also breaking the law. I want you to wrestle with that. You may feel that certain crimes do change the nature of the person who commits them, and that is cool. It's also cool if you think people can change, and that they aren't forever defined by some specific actions. You're an adult. Make up your own mind.

I very intentionally had Henry start his coffee request with the last words he said to Elizabeth. I wanted to show some measure of

continuity. I want to offer the possibility that even compatible relationships may not be able to last through every "life phase" (or whatever language you want to use). Henry and Elizabeth are still deeply compatible, but the ethical dilemmas they cope with in their careers may be too difficult. I don't know if I think they would be or not. But in this story, I'm exploring the possibility that they can't manage the demands placed upon them by their careers along with maintaining their relationship. If that were the case, there is a possibility that once they are out of that career situation, they might be able to sustain the relationship again. But the way Henry treated Elizabeth might preclude any future relationship. That's up to you. Though I am interested to know what you think would happen.

I dislike the language of trigger warnings. I'll put a content warning on it, but the word trigger is reductive. Guns have triggers, and guns kill people (sorry gun rights activists). I don't know about you, but if I get triggered, I am not going to go off like a gun and kill someone. I also think that it should not be my responsibility to offer trigger warnings. However, I agree that this material is pretty difficult, and to be a good person, I will offer a warning in the description. I prefer to call these warnings "content warnings" instead of "trigger warnings." I do not provide too many warnings as a general rule. I have personally found that it is important to learn to assess material quickly to find out if it will present a problem for you. Of course this isn't possible in every situation, but I feel that this story doesn't have the violence come completely out of left field. You have a bit of warning/notice. I empower you to proactively make decisions about what content to consume or continue consuming. Don't wait for me to tell you that material could be difficult. Not everyone will do that. I have this story rated T, but it might be more appropriate to rate it as M. Let me know if you have thoughts on that. I do want to make sure that if there are any people under the age of consent in the MSec fandom, they are dutifully informed of the nature of the content that is available to them.

Do please let me know if you still feel that this story glorifies domestic violence. I may want to make edits to make my writing more clear. Again, I am taking the time to explain some of the things I have attempted to convey in this story because I am not confident I have conveyed them sufficiently in the writing. Your thoughts on that would be appreciated as I try to improve my skills.

I also want to know if you think the story would be better as a single chapter. I want to take some more time to think about how the length of chapters affects the presentation of the material.

End
file.